

Factors Contributing to Social Isolation and Loneliness and its effect on the Psychological Well-Being of Malayali Migrant Students in Uk

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Abstract— Migration is a well-known process, movement of people from one place to another, this may be due to certain reasons like, employment opportunities, education purposes, enhance the standard of living etc. This study mainly focuses on the effects of social isolation on the psychological and emotional well-being of international migrant students from Kerala to the United Kingdom for educational purposes. Migration of young students is increasing day by day because of the high quality and world class education provided by the other countries and also the better infrastructure facilities. The objective of the present study was to find out the effects of social isolation on the psychological well being of international students. This study also studies about the financial or socio-economic background of the respondents and the causes or factors contributing to social isolation and the coping mechanisms they used to combat loneliness and isolation. The present study is a cross-sectional study conducted among 60 international migrant students from Kerala residing in United Kingdom for up to three years. The data was collected through structured questionnaires. The major finding of the present study is financial or economic aspect is the most significant factor that contribute to social isolation and loneliness followed by cultural and language barrier. This study contributes to the existing body of literature on the factors contributing to social isolation faced by the international student by providing a focused analysis of Malayali students' experiences residing in the United Kingdom and underscores the need for culturally sensitive support systems in educational institutions for better environment that fosters meaningful social relationships. This information is valuable for the educational institution and mental health sectors to create a supportive environment for the migrated students to enhance their psychological well-being and academic success.



Keywords— Social isolation, migration, coping mechanisms, social relationship

I. INTRODUCTION

Social isolation is a wide spread common problem faced by most of the international students as they move from their native place to other countries. The main issue is about the complexities they have to gone through while adapting to the unfamiliar environment of the educational institutions, the cultural norms. It is quite difficult to being away from home, family members, relatives, and familiar surroundings. This results in feeling of loneliness and detachment.

Social isolation is not about being physically alone or sitting alone in a particular place for hours, it's about the emotional strain of feeling disconnected from social relations. The absence of familiar faces, cultural differences, and struggles with language barriers can deepen this sense of isolation, making it harder to build new relationships or find a sense of belonging.

For these students, the transition is not just academic but deeply personal, affecting their mental health and overall well-being. As they try to carve out a place for themselves

in a foreign land, the lack of established social networks can make even small daily challenges seem insurmountable. Recognizing and addressing these struggles is essential to supporting their journey and helping them thrive.

(Bista & Dagley, 2015).

Emotional loneliness happens when someone doesn't have close relationships, like a best friend or partner, to rely on for support. Studies, especially with older adults, show that not having these emotional connections can lead to depression and anxiety and in some cases, those feelings can also make it difficult to form close bonds. While both emotional and social loneliness are linked to depression and anxiety, emotional loneliness tends to have a stronger connection to these struggles (Russell et al., 1984).

So International students, especially from Kerala, often face challenges like loneliness, cultural differences, academic pressure and financial stress. So students might feel the stress constantly when they are try to adapt to a new situation or environment, if they fails to adapt appropriately results in lack of social connection and alienation. If the universities or educational institutions can provide right support at right time can help a lot of students to overcome this difficult phase. The universities can take initiatives to create a supporting environment to create a sense of belongingness and emotional attachment among students.

There are numerous studies on the mental health of international students, but little focus or attention is given to study about the experiences of social isolation and loneliness among students from Kerala studying in the United Kingdom. This study aims to fill that gap by identifying the factors that contribute to social isolation, and how these factors affect the students mental and psychological well-being, and also the strategies used by the students to adjust with this situation.

This study is significant because it addresses a gap in the literature that deals with the experiences of international students from Kerala residing in the United Kingdom, particularly deals with the areas of social isolation and its psychological effects. This study takes a detailed observation of the experiences of international students from Kerala who settled in the UK. This research offers valuable insights that can enhance the academic knowledge to develop strategies or interventions for improving their mental health status and also strengthen the social connections and academic performances.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kerala has a long history of migration, mainly for better employment opportunities. Recently, more young people decided to study in abroad. This change is mainly due to the

lack of employment opportunities in their native place and lack of salary. Young people are more desired to achieve advanced skills and better job opportunities. This clearly indicates how global education influence the economic trends and migration patterns. Young generation gave more importance for their improved life styles and financial stability for achieving a brighter future. (Joseph, 2023).

Studying abroad is always a mix of various emotions like excitement, tension, stress, the greatest challenge they have to address is social isolation. The range of social isolation can vary from simple to complex things like there is no one to talk with to difficulty in finding someone with similar interests or experiences. This makes them difficult to open up and share their feelings. This sense of isolation can have a negative effect and ends up in anxiety and depression. The emotional strain affects their motivation and results in poor academic performance (Auerbach et al., 2019).

For most of the students going to the United Kingdom to study is a way to establish a better brighter future and gain financial stability. However, once they arrive in a new place or country, they often face financial difficulties to meet their needs. Above all of this, there are certain other aspects like family expectation. Family members always look forward for their successful career and also have a notion that they provide financial support for the family. This also adds the stress and struggles hardly for balancing family expectations with their mental health. (Hercog & van de Laar, 2017).

The World Health Organization describes psychological well-being as a state where individuals can grow to their full potential, handle everyday stresses, and work productively. It's an essential part of living a balanced, fulfilling life. Strong psychological well-being doesn't just make us feel happier—it's also closely tied to better mental and physical health and even a longer life. Taking care of our mental state is a key step toward achieving overall health and happiness. (Dr. M. Dhanabhakym & Sarath M, 2023).

Families often face financial burdens due to the higher costs of higher education, including tuition fees and living expenses. Many students rely heavily on part-time jobs to cover their financial needs while studying. While this helps them manage expenses, it often adds to their stress and makes it harder to keep up with academic responsibilities. Balancing work and studies can become a constant struggle, leaving them feeling stretched thin and overwhelmed. (Jenny, 2013). Additionally, the cultural value placed on economic success and family expectations can increase the pressure on students to perform academically and succeed financially (Hercog & van de Laar, 2017).

Social isolation among international students often starts from the cultural differences, language barriers, and lack of

social support networks. These challenges are further compounded by discrimination based on caste, race, gender, and place of origin. Such preconceptions create constraints in forming social connections and make it difficult for them to feel the sense of belongingness. Instead of finding social support and acceptance in social groups, they may deal with alienation, which worsen the feelings of isolation and rejection (Research & 2021, 2021).

Furthermore, studying abroad often cuts down the opportunities for social engagement due to financial instability, because students often struggle to achieve a balance between their academic and work life (Jenny, 2013). Adapting to the unfamiliar academic curriculum and social expectations also acts as an additional burden and leads to feelings of alienation, it makes them difficult to build social relations with peer groups and communities (Sawir et al., 2008).

The fundamental cause behind social isolation faced by the international students is limited interpersonal communication. This can lead to loneliness, and difficulty in adjusting to a new environment. Language barriers and cultural differences acts as a hindrance for them to make friends and adapt to the new environment. when they are socially excluded it negatively affects academic performance and psychological well-being. Students are motivated to use campus services and practice self-care to maintain well-being. Universities can help them by developing programs and clubs that promote interaction between the domestic and international students (Alshammari et al., 2023).

Social isolation and loneliness significantly impact mental health, leading to issues like anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem. Persistent loneliness has long-term effects on thoughts, emotions, and overall health, hindering students' ability to adapt to their new environment (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). For students from Kerala, these challenges are amplified by their cultural background, which values close social and cultural ties. The separation from family and friends often deepens feelings of loneliness, especially when coupled with academic stress (Udayanga, 2024). Despite these struggles, maintaining cultural practices and traditions can provide a sense of belonging, acting as a coping mechanism for many students (Research & 2021, 2021).

While social isolation presents significant challenges, many students actively seek ways to cope. Participation in cultural associations, university support systems, and social groups provides avenues for building connections and alleviating loneliness (Udayanga, 2024). Engaging in peer networks and community activities also helps students navigate the complexities of living in a foreign environment while

preserving their cultural identity (Research & 2021, 2021). However, the effectiveness of these coping strategies varies among individuals, influenced by factors such as personality, cultural background, and personal circumstances (Sawir et al., 2008).

Humans always look for social connections, even with things they watch like TV characters or concepts like God. But sometimes, people feel isolated or lonely even when social opportunities are available, the reason behind this is they can't able to connect with the people properly. Persistent loneliness can affect a person's thoughts, emotions, and health, causing long-term problems in their life (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

Prolonged social isolation leads to increased risks of depression, anxiety, and poor academic performance. Loneliness among migrant students has been linked to feelings of exclusion, loneliness and lower self-esteem and affects their mental health to a larger extent.

This review highlights the multidimensional challenges faced by the international students from Kerala in the UK, varying from financial strain and social isolation to its intense psychological effects. When the Social and cultural barriers combined with academic and economic stresses can adversely affects their mental health. However, resilience and adaptability enable students to overcome these challenges. Future research should focus on developing targeted interventions to address their unique needs for promoting psychological and emotional well-being and help to achieve academic success in diverse atmosphere.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the effects of social isolation on the psychological well-being of international students from Kerala studying in the UK. A structured approach is used to collect and analyze data to provide insights into the research objectives.

This study uses a quantitative research design to explore the Factors contributing to Social Isolation and Loneliness and its effect on the social isolation on the psychological well-being of international students from Kerala studying in the UK. The target population consists of international students from Kerala who have been residing in the UK for up to three years. A total of 60 participants will be selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure diversity in gender, age, and academic disciplines.

Data will be collected through structured questionnaire using google forms covering demographic details, factors of social isolation, psychological well-being, and coping mechanisms. Statistical analysis will be performed using

SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

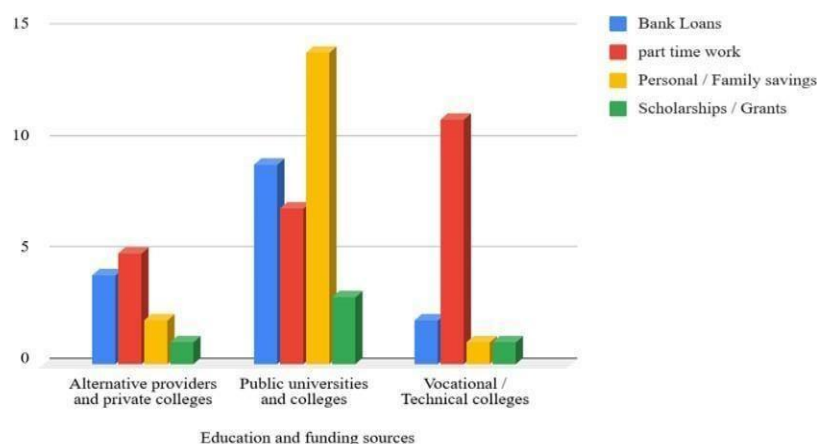


Fig.1: Funding sources of students studying in various educational institutions

This figure shows that most of the students rely up on personal and family savings, particularly among students studying in public universities and vocational colleges. Bank loans and part time work are the most common funding source across all institutions. Scholarships and grants are rarely utilized across all institutions.

This result aligns with the findings discussed in the literature review regarding the financial challenges faced by international students, particularly in the context of the rising costs of higher education. As mentioned in Jenny (2013), many international students struggle to cover tuition fees and living expenses, often relying on personal savings and part-time employment to manage financial burdens. This finding is also consistent with Hercog & van de Laar (2017), who highlighted that many Indian students in the UK, including those from Kerala, face financial constraints and are pressured by family expectations to succeed financially, which can further intensify their stress.

The limited availability of scholarships and government grants, emphasize that these monetary assistance are often

very hard to access or they are not enough to meet the full costs for most students. This only adds to the financial pressure discussed in previous research. So many students depend on their personal family savings and part-time jobs to meet their needs. This struggle to balance between the academic demands and financial instability is a common ground for international students (Jenny, 2013).

This finding corresponds with the literature findings as both draw attention to the fact that international student, especially from Kerala, face significant financial challenges while studying abroad. The literature reviewed indicated that many students rely on personal savings, part-time work, and loans to fund their education, with limited use of scholarships or grants. This is consistent with your results, which show that personal and family savings are the primary source of funding, followed by bank loans and part-time work, while scholarships and grants are rarely utilized. The literature also emphasizes the financial strain on students, particularly in light of rising education costs, which aligns with your findings.

Table 1: Crosstabulation of Family's Financial Status in Meeting Daily Expenses and Frequency of Stress Symptoms

How would you describe your family's financial status in meeting daily expenses * How often do you experience symptoms of stress such as rapid heartbeat or difficulty in breathing Crosstabulation

Count		How often do you experience symptoms of stress such as rapid heartbeat or difficulty in breathing				Total
		Never	Occasionally	Often	Very Often	
How	Constantly facing			0	0	6
Would	financial difficulties					
You	Financially stable but	1		8	5	11
describe	with some struggles	0				34

Your family's financial status in Meeting Daily expenses	Financially stable without struggles Frequent struggles Financially	3	4	3	11
Total	1 2	11	9	28	60

The analysis shows that there is a relationship between the financial status and stress levels. Students who are facing financial difficulties consistently are more prone to higher stress, while those who are financially stable report lower stress. Individuals with some financial struggles show varying stress levels. The Chi-Square test results ($p = 0.007$) and the likelihood ratio test ($p = 0.002$) support the connection between financial difficulties and increased stress.

The findings of this study align with previous literature highlighting the significant impact of financial challenges on students' mental well-being. As noted in the literature, financial difficulties, such as those faced by international students, can contribute to increased stress and emotional

strain, leading to negative effects on their psychological well-being (Jenny, 2013) (Hercog & van de Laar, 2017)).

In particular, the literature suggests that financial burdens, combined with the pressures of academic performance and adjusting to a new environment, can exacerbate feelings of stress and isolation (Udayanga, 2024). These challenges are consistent with the study's findings, where individuals experiencing constant financial difficulties reported higher levels of stress. The relationship between financial strain and stress, as revealed by the Chi-Square and likelihood ratio tests, further reinforces the arguments in the literature that addressing financial challenges can be crucial in reducing stress and improving the mental health of students, especially international migrants from Kerala studying in the UK.

Table 2: Crosstabulation of Study Focus Challenges and Loneliness Frequency in the UK
Do you find it difficult to focus on your studies due to feelings of isolation * How often do you feel lonely or isolated while living in UK Crosstabulation

Count		How often do you feel lonely or isolated while living in UK					
		Always	Never	Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Total
Do you find it difficult to focus on your studies due to feelings of Isolation	Maybe	1	1	5	0	4	11
	No	1	1	2	8	5	17
	Yes	24	0	5	0	3	32
Total		26	2	12	8	12	60

The data shows a strong connection between the social isolation and difficulty in concentrating on academics. Students who always feel isolated are more likely to struggle with focusing on their academic work, while those who experience lesser level of isolation tend to concentrate and perform better. The Chi-Square test results (Pearson value =

47.090, p -value = 0.000) and Likelihood Ratio test (value = 50.247, p -value = 0.000) indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the degree of isolation and the academic performance. These findings suggest that frequent isolation interrupt academic performance, creating a cycle that worsens both isolation and academic challenges.

This highlights the need for support systems to address the social and academic challenges faced by international students.

loneliness is not only emotionally distressing but it also hinders the cognitive functioning like thinking, reasoning, attention, problem solving etc. and concentration, leading to difficulties in academic performance. Social isolation leads to loneliness and this negatively affects both mental health

and results in poor academic performance. The challenges faced by international students in adjusting to a new social and academic environment (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010) as discussed in the review, supports this finding. So, when emotional distress from isolation, combined with academic pressure, deepen the difficulties faced by the students in focusing on their academics and they can't even perform better in academics.

Table 3: Crosstabulation of Friendship Challenges and Loneliness Frequency in the UK

What is the primary factor you find challenging in forming friendships in UK * Howoften do you feel lonely or isolated while living in UK Crosstabulation

Count

		How often do you feel lonely or isolated while living in					
		UK					
		Always	Never	Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Total
What is the primary factor you find challenging in forming friendship s in UK	Academic work load	1	0	3	0	2	6
	Different cultural backgrounds	8	1	6	2	6	23
	Lack of common interests	1	1	2	2	3	9
	Language Barriers	16	0	1	4	1	22
Total		26	2	12	8	12	60

The findings indicate that language barriers and cultural differences are the most significant challenges faced by the international students in the UK when trying to establish social connections or friendships.

These issues are closely related to the feelings of loneliness and isolation especially among students who struggle with language. The analysis confirms that there is a significant link between these challenges and social isolation. While other factors like academic pressure and lack of shared interests were also mentioned, they had a lesser impact on loneliness when compared with language proficiency. The results highlights the importance of providing support for

improving the language help and cultural integration programs, to help the students for breaking these barriers and create meaningful social connections with others.

The findings of this study closely match with what the previous studies has shown about the struggles faced by the international students especially language barriers and cultural differences. These challenges often make it very difficult for students to connect with others, sometimes they can't even express their feelings or ideas correctly due to language barrier. And results in feelings of isolation and loneliness. As discussed

in earlier studies these issues can have a negative or damaging effect on the mental well-being of these students.

The results from this study emphasize language and cultural differences directly contribute to loneliness among international students. The need for support systems, like language assistance

and programs that promote cultural integration, has been highlighted in other research, and this study further emphasizes the importance of such initiatives. By addressing these challenges, universities can create a more inclusive environment that helps students build meaningful relationships and improve their overall well-being (Alshammari et al., 2023

Table 4: Crosstabulation of Group Participation and Socializing Effectiveness for Coping

Do you participate in student clubs, societies, or group events to help manage feelings of isolation?

* How effective do you find socializing with other international students as a way to cope with loneliness or stress

Crosstabulation

Count		How effective do you find socializing with other international students as a way to cope with loneliness or stress				
		Ineffectiv e, I prefer solitude or other Methods	Moderatel y effective, when I have time	Slightly effective, but not my preferred method	Very effective, I actively seek it out	Total
Do you	Never, I'm not	5	1	4	1	11
Participate	comfortable with group					
in student	<u>events</u>					
clubs,	Occasionally, but it	1	4	6	5	16
societies,	<u>depends on my schedule</u>					
or group	Rarely, I attend only	6	3	14	2	25
events to	<u>occasionally</u>					
Help	Regularly, I find it helps	0	0	1	7	8
Manage	a lot					
feelings of						
isolation?						
Total		12	8	25	15	60

The data shows that participating in student clubs and socializing with other international students can really help with loneliness and stress. The ones who actively participate in group events tend to find socializing much more effective in dealing with their emotional challenges. The results from the Chi-Square test (p-value = 0.001) confirm that there's a strong connection between active participation in student clubs to reduce isolation and loneliness. The Phi coefficient (0.701) and Cramer's V (0.405) shows the strong relation.

These findings suggest that engaging in group events can be a meaningful way to tackle isolation.

The coping strategies, like participating in social or cultural groups, to manage loneliness and stress are helpful for some students, but social isolation still correlates with academic difficulties, this implies that that these coping mechanisms may not always be sufficient for each and every student who

feel socially isolated, they need some other coping mechanisms to overcome this. Therefore, a more comprehensive and holistic approach is needed to support the students.

V. CONCLUSION

This research highlights the significant challenges faced by international students in the UK, including financial strain, loneliness, academic stress, and the strategies they used to cope up with these situations. Financial struggles are a major source of stress for many students, often contributing to feelings of isolation and difficulty focusing on their studies. Above all other factors, language barriers and cultural differences make it harder for students to establish social connection with others, making them lonelier and more disconnected. Some students try to find relief by socializing with other international students or joining in peer groups or college clubs, but this strategy doesn't always work for everyone. Many students still feel isolated due to the economic constraints or academic pressure. These challenges highlight the need and importance of more personalized support from universities or educational institutions for the better adaptation of international students in their novel surroundings. It's not just about helping them fit in socially, but also addressing their financial and academic struggles. By offering a more comprehensive approach to support them so that they can better manage the difficulties they faced and succeed in their academic journey.

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